

Corporation for National and Community Service

2010 Social Innovation Fund

Venture Philanthropy Partners

Reviewer Comments – Phase 2

SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND 2010 EVALUATION CONSENSUS FORM

Instructions throughout this form are indicated in red.

Before you begin, please fill out the Applicant Name and Application ID# in the above header.

This Evaluation Consensus Form (ECF) is where each panel records its consensus assessment of an application. The completion of this form may be led by any panelist; that individual will be designated the Lead Reviewer (LR). All Reviewers are expected to serve as the LR on at least two applications. **The evaluation consensus assessment should be based on the panel's examination of only the subcategories highlighted in red in the chart below, not the full application. In addition, Evaluation Reviewers should only assess how well applicants responded to the specific evidence-based criteria within the subcategories highlighted in yellow in this form.**

Category	Percentage	Subcategories
Program Design	45%	A. Goals and Objectives B. Use of Evidence C. Community Resources D. Description of Activities i. Subgranting ii. Technical Assistance and Support
Organizational Capacity	35%	A. Ability to Provide Program Oversight B. Ability to Provide Fiscal Oversight
Cost-Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	20%	A. Budget and Program Design B. Match Sources

Panels will utilize Panel Consensus Calls to discuss each application and come to agreement on the content of the Narrative Assessment for each category, the Rating for each category, the Overall Appraisal Statement and the Band in which the application will be placed. When completing this form, the LR should rely on four primary documents: 1) the application being reviewed; 2) the SIF Review Notes page from each panelist; 3) the SIF Notice of Federal Funds Availability (NOFA); 4) the Consensus Rubric at the end of this form.

Please complete the following steps:

1. For each of the 3 categories the LR should:
 - a. **Write a 3 – 5 sentence Narrative Assessment** reflecting the panel's assessment of the quality of the response in the category being assessed; it is important that this narrative include brief summary information, but more importantly, the panel's evaluation of the application's quality.
 - b. **List the application's significant strengths and weaknesses and annotate each.** Each significant strength or weakness **must** be supported by **at least one** of the Eligibility or Application Review Criteria that were in the SIF NOFA. (criteria are included in this form)
 - c. **Taking into consideration** both the Narrative Assessment and the listed strengths and weaknesses, **select a category Rating** by checking the appropriate box.
2. **Complete the Overall Appraisal section.** In this section, you will:
 - a. Provide an Overall Appraisal Statement; and
 - b. Select a Consensus Band that represents the quality of the application as a whole. The Bands are described in the Overall Appraisal section at the end of this form.

PROGRAM DESIGN (45%)

The **Social Innovation Fund Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)** states that the following will be considered when reviewing an applicant's Program Design.

A. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Corporation asks applicants to use a thematic approach in describing their proposed investments in community organizations. As established in the Act, there are two basic operational models of SIF intermediaries. The first is a SIF that will operate in a single geographic location, and address one or more priority issues within that location. This model is referred to as a "geographically-based SIF." The second model is a SIF that will address a single priority issue area in multiple geographic locations. This model is referred to as an "issue-based SIF." The Corporation will assess whether the application properly proposes goals and objectives as either a geographically-based or an issue-based SIF.

i. Geographically-Based SIF

The application must provide 1) statistics on the needs related to the issue area(s) within the specific local geographic area, and 2) information on the specific measurable outcomes related to those issue areas that the applicant will seek to improve.

ii. Issue-Based SIF

The application must provide 1) statistics on the needs related to the issue area within the geographic areas likely to be served, including statistics demonstrating that those geographic areas have a high need in the priority issue area, and 2) information on the specific measurable outcomes related to the priority issue area that the applicant will seek to improve.

B. USE OF EVIDENCE

i. Applicants must include in their application information describing their track record of using rigorous evidence, data, and evaluation tools to:

- *Select and invest in subgrantees;*
- *Support and monitor the replication and expansion of subgrantees; and*
- *Achieve measurable outcomes.*

D. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

i. Subgranting

- ##### **a.**
- Applicants must describe the process by which they will competitively select their nonprofit community organization subgrantees, and, if applicable, the process by which they have pre-selected some subgrantees. Specifically, applicants must describe how their competitive subgrant selection process will ensure a portfolio of subgrantees that are innovative nonprofit community organizations serving low-income communities and that possess:*

- *A commitment to and track record of using data and evaluation for performance and program improvement;*
- *Evidence of effectiveness, including a demonstrated track record of achieving specific measurable outcomes related to the measurable outcomes for the intermediary;*
- *Strong potential for replication or expansion;*
- *A well-defined plan for achieving specific measurable outcomes connected to the measurable outcomes for the intermediary, evaluation of program effectiveness, performance improvement, and replication or expansion; and*

ii. **Technical Assistance and Support**

- a. *Applicants must include in their application information describing how they will provide technical assistance and support (other than financial support) that will increase the ability of subgrantees to achieve their measurable outcomes, including replication or expansion. Replication or expansion may happen in various ways (including, for example, creating new sites or affiliating with another program to replicate an intervention) and in multiple contexts (including, for example, serving more people in a current geography or growing to new geographies).*

Provide a panel assessment of the application's PROGRAM DESIGN as follows:

- **Write a brief Narrative Assessment;**
- **List the Significant Strengths and Weaknesses (annotate your comments by referencing the applicable Eligibility or Application Review Criteria); and**
- **Select a Rating for this section.**

Panel Narrative Assessment

The application is a \$2M request for a geographically-based SIF in Washington, D.C. to support four pre-selected subgrantees (College Summit, KIPP, Latin America Youth Center, Year Up) and up to four as yet unselected subgrantees. The applicant's greatest strength is a rich portfolio approach wherein subgrantees collaborate and contribute data to a "common framework." There are weaknesses in their discussion of the evidence supporting pre-selected subgrantees, with important information missing.

Significant Strengths

The applicants proposed specific measurable outcomes: improved school outcomes, literacy rates; high school graduation and GED attainment; post-secondary enrollment; post-secondary attendance; and attainment of post-secondary credential. (*Program Design, A.i.*)

The applicant describes a well-developed "networked approach." Pre-selected subgrantees were selected for, among other things, a "belief that collective action will create results that are greater than any one organization could achieve alone" (p.5). The competitive process for selecting additional subgrantees will identify subgrantees who "fill in service gaps and strengthen the Network." This idea is expanded upon pages 7-8 with paragraphs on "address[ing] more than one critical challenge concurrently," "connect[ing] approaches and cross-pollinat[ing] solutions, and "minimi[ing] duplication, creat[ing] effectiveness," and "overcom[ing] common challenges." Subgrantees will be involved in the

development of milestones, and they will jointly plan, collaborate, and identify potential cost savings. (*Program Design, D.i.*)

The applicant lays out a generally strong plan for four levels of evaluation support: subgrantees will contribute data to a common framework to measure "success" in education and employment; VPP and Child Trends will collect additional data from subgrantees on other outcomes; they will support experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations of all subgrantees; and Child Trends will conduct implementation evaluations to assess fidelity to program execution (p. 3). The overarching goals here are strong. Consistent with their network approach, they plan to "generate benchmark data within a single shared framework to create accountability for achieving outcomes" (p. 7). The applicant understands the power of comparative outcome indicators as learning and performance tools, and that is a distinguishing strength of the application. Other parts of the plan raise a few questions. (*Program Design, D.i.*)

- It will be important to ensure that they carefully plan how they will make this happen if subgrantees are currently using different measures for the same outcomes. For example, there are many ways to measure high school dropout (and a lot of controversy about the right way to do it). If one subgrantee measures it in ways that are more restrictive than another, there is no way to know whether differences in scores are real differences or an artifact of differences in measurement. As important as identifying the right outcomes is using the right measures so that the data is reliable, valid, and comparable.
- It is unclear how these "levels of support" (or really "types" of support) fit together. For example, it is unclear why Child Trends will conduct implementation evaluations separately from the experimental and quasi-experimental studies. Studying implementation within the context of those impact studies would produce cost savings, and potentially more useful findings because implementation and outcome data can be linked. On the other hand, if the idea is to evaluate performance, it is not clear how Child Trends implementation evaluations add value beyond their work assisting subgrantees with their own performance measurement systems. Some clarification, or perhaps rethinking of the plan, would be useful.
- It may be premature to commit to conducting experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations for *all* subgrantees (p. 3). If it is inappropriate or unfeasible to evaluate a program using an experimental or very strong quasi-experimental study, will it be automatically rejected as a subgrantee? For example, one criteria for judging experimental studies as ethical is if there is greater demand for services than can be met. Thus youth are not more likely to be denied access to services simply because of the study. In cases of greater demand than can be filled, random assignment in the experiment gives all kids an equal chance of receiving services.

The applicant's description of changes to its work from fund 1 to 2 (first to second portfolio) exemplifies their commitment to using evidence to improve their work. They say they reviewed lessons learned from their first portfolio to, for example, expand the selection process to include greater focus on reviewing program quality and moving the business planning process from early to late in the selection process. This description of changes, however, would have been more convincing if they had talked about particular pieces of evidence, data, or analyses that led them to make these decisions. We are largely told about changes made, based on evidence that is not described. (*Program Design, D.i.*)

Significant Weaknesses

In their description of prior evaluation evidence on subgrantees, important information is missing.
(*Program Design, D.i.*)

- For example, they say KIPP (pre-selected subgrantee) engaged 12 independent studies of its program and say this demonstrates a “moderate level of evidence.” But they do not clearly discuss what the research findings were. Were the findings consistent across the twelve studies? What research designs were used? Were these studies conducted in different places or with different populations?
- They say LAYC (another pre-selected subgrantee) demonstrates “preliminary evidence of its efforts” through ongoing data collection and assessment. The application does not state what the evidence was, nor what data is collected and analyzed that supports preliminary evidence of potential impact on particular outcomes.

Select a Rating for PROGRAM DESIGN (double-click in the applicable box and select “checked”)

☐ Excellent

☒ Strong

☐ Satisfactory

☐ Weak/Non-responsive

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY (35%)

The Social Innovation Fund NOFA states that the following will be considered when reviewing an applicant’s Organizational Capacity.

A. ABILITY TO PROVIDE PROGRAM OVERSIGHT

In evaluating your organization’s ability to provide program oversight, the Corporation will consider:

- The extent to which your organization has a sound structure including:*
 - *The ability to provide sound programmatic oversight, including:*
 - *Experience with and capacity for evaluation; and*
 - *Experience with and capacity for supporting replication or expansion.*
 - *A well-designed plan and systems for organizational (as opposed to subgrantee) self-assessment and continuous improvement*
- Whether your organization has a sound record of accomplishment, including the extent to which you:*
 - *Have a track record of supporting organizations that demonstrate evidence of impact;*

Provide a panel assessment of the application’s ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY as follows:

- Write a brief Narrative Assessment;
- List the Significant Strengths and Weaknesses (annotate your comments by referencing the applicable Eligibility or Application Review Criteria); and
- Select a Rating for this section.

Panel Narrative Assessment

Applicant Name: Venture Philanthropy
Application ID#: 10si115196

While Child Trends has ample experience and capacity on data use, it is less clear that they have strong experience and capacity designing and implementing rigorous evaluation studies. Perhaps another partner would be useful for those latter needs.

Significant Strengths

A significant strength is the partnership with Child Trends, which is located in the geographic region and has ample experience with data and outcomes. (*Organizational Capacity, A.i.*)

The applicant describes helping prior grantees develop performance measurement systems, which addresses a very important need for nonprofits. (*Organizational Capacity, A.i.*)

The applicant's commitment to using evidence to improve their own work is evidenced in a public report from a prior third-party evaluation of their work. (*Organizational Capacity, A.i.*)

The applicant outlines a strong track record of helping its grantees improve and expand. E.g., Deploying McKinsey to support the Friendship Public Charter School to manage more tightly to performance metrics. (*Organizational Capacity, A.ii.*)

Significant Weaknesses

While Child Trends has strengths in terms of data, they do not appear to have strong experience designing and implementing experimental evaluations. Field experiments are challenging to implement well, and it is important to have seasoned experts who understand the many things that can go wrong and know ways to circumvent those challenges. (*Organizational Capacity, A.i.*)

The descriptions of monitoring and evaluation plans are insufficiently illustrated. (*Organizational Capacity, A.i.*)

- They say they will use outcomes data to support program improvement, but it is not clear how. Outcomes data tells you how youth are performing but they do not pinpoint which program aspects to change in order to improve youth outcomes. For that, you need to link data on program services with youth outcomes.
- They also say they will have "regular check-ins" with subgrantees, but not how many check-ins there will be nor how those will transpire and lead to stronger TA or support.

Their continuous Improvement plans are also vague. For example, they say they will collect quarterly data on their performance but do not provide details on what aspects of performance they will monitor. (*Organizational Capacity, A.i.*)

The applicant does not set out an adequate plan for assessing the contributions to subgrantee outcomes from the different non-financial elements in the applicant's investment model. (*Organizational Capacity, A.i.*)

Select a Rating for ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY (double-click in the applicable box and select "checked")

☐ Excellent

☐ Strong

☒ Satisfactory

☐ Weak/Non-responsive

COST EFFECTIVENESS AND BUDGET ADEQUACY (20%)

The Social Innovation Fund NOFA states that the following will be considered when reviewing an applicant's Cost-Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy.

A. BUDGET AND PROGRAM DESIGN

In evaluating the cost effectiveness and budget adequacy of your proposed program, the Corporation will consider:

- i. *Whether your program is cost-effective*
- ii. *Whether your budget is adequate to support your program design.*

Provide a panel assessment of the application's COST-EFFECTIVENESS AND BUDGET ADEQUACY as follows:

- **Write a brief Narrative Assessment;**
 - **List the Significant Strengths and Weaknesses (annotate your comments by referencing the applicable Eligibility or Application Review Criteria); and**
 - **Select a Rating for this section.**
-

Panel Narrative Assessment

This is difficult to judge because it is not clear whether subgrantee evaluations are included in their budgets.

Significant Strengths

The budget seems adequate to the investment model set out in the proposal, with appropriate rations across budget categories. This assumes some costs for experimental evaluations are included in subgrantee budgets.

Significant Weaknesses

\$119K is requested for Child Trends to undertake a range of activities including 1) creation of an outcomes framework and metrics, 2) grantee assistance in developing performance measurement systems, 3) assessment on quality of individual, quasi-experimental evaluations, 4) development of RFP for experimental evaluations of individual subgrantees, 5) periodic implementation evaluations, 6) overall analysis of shared data on outcomes (p. 37). While Child Trends is a good partner on the data and outcomes work, it is unclear that they are strong partners for developing an RFP for experimental evaluations. (*Cost, A.i., ii*)

Applicant Name: Venture Philanthropy
Application ID#: 10si115196

Besides the budgeting for Child Trends, there does not appear to be additional budgeting for program evaluation. It may be that some evaluation costs are part of subgrantees' budgets, but that is not clear. (Cost, A.ii.)

Select a Rating for COST-EFFECTIVENESS AND BUDGET ADEQUACY (double-click in the applicable box and select "checked")

☐ Excellent

☐ Strong

☒ Satisfactory

☐ Weak/Non-responsive

OVERALL APPRAISAL

I. Provide a 3 - 5 sentence Overall Appraisal Statement of the application taking into consideration:

- The Narrative Assessments, significant strengths and weaknesses, and Ratings from each category; and
- The weighting of each category (Program Design (45%), Organizational Capacity (35%), Cost-Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy (20%)).

The applicant presents a well-developed high engagement investment model. Perhaps its greatest strength is a rich portfolio approach wherein subgrantees collaborate and contribute data to a common performance and measurement framework. There are weaknesses in the applicant's discussion of evidence underlying their assessments of subgrantees in terms of preliminary, moderate, and strong evidence. As a partner, Child Trends brings strong expertise and experience with data and outcomes, but they lack strong experience designing and implementing strong experimental studies.

II. Select one Band for this application (double-click in the applicable box and select "checked")
Ensure that your selection is supported by your panel's Narrative Assessments, significant strengths and weaknesses, Ratings, and Overall Appraisal Statement. Take into consideration the weighting of each category.

- ☐ **Band I (Excellent):** A comprehensive and thorough application of excellent merit with very significant strengths and no/minimal significant weaknesses.
- ☒ **Band II (Strong):** An application that demonstrates overall competence and is worthy of support, where the value of the significant strengths outweigh the identified weaknesses.
- ☐ **Band III (Satisfactory):** An application with potential, where strengths and weaknesses are approximately equal. However, some fundamental weaknesses have been identified.
- ☐ **Band IV (Weak/Non-Responsive):** An application with very significant weaknesses and no/minimal significant strengths that have been identified. This option may also include an application that is non-responsive to the published criteria.

Applicant Name: Venture Philanthropy

Application ID#: 10si115196

CONSENSUS RUBRIC

Please use this Consensus Rubric as guidance when selecting your Ratings or Bands.

BAND I (Excellent) — *A BAND I rating reflects that the application is compelling, consistently excellent in quality, and addresses all requirements; thereby showing the highest potential for success.*

The **Excellent** application consistently:

- ✓ Goes beyond what was requested, showing that the applicant has anticipated issues that may arise.
- ✓ Provides a thorough, detailed response to all of the information requested.
- ✓ Provides a clear and highly compelling description of how the proposed activities will achieve the anticipated results.
- ✓ Provides clear evidence to support all objectives of this section (no assumptions are made).
- ✓ Supports ideas and objectives with comprehensive plans explaining and connecting ideas to objectives.

BAND II (Strong) — *A BAND II rating reflects that the application is solid, good-quality, and has great potential for success.*

The **Strong** application:

- ✓ Provides a response to all of the information requested.
- ✓ Provides a realistic description of how the proposed activities will achieve the anticipated results.
- ✓ Explains most assumptions and reasons.
- ✓ Supports ideas with comprehensive plans, examples, or outlines.

BAND III (Satisfactory) — *A BAND III rating reflects that the application generally meets requirements for a reasonable chance of success, but is neither especially strong nor especially weak.*

The **Satisfactory** application:

- ✓ Covers most of the information requested, with a few exceptions.
- ✓ Is sometimes unclear how the proposed activities will achieve the anticipated results.
- ✓ Makes some assumptions and leaves some reasons unexplained.
- ✓ Supports individual ideas with plans, examples, or outline.

Applicant Name: Venture Philanthropy

Application ID#: 10si115196

BAND IV (Weak/Non-responsive) — *A weak/non-responsive rating reflects that the application is below standard especially in ability, skill, or quality; indicating that this application will most likely not succeed as described or is not responsive to the application requirements.*

The **Weak/Non-responsive** application:

- ✓ Does not provide one or more key pieces of requested information.
- ✓ Gives an unclear description of how the proposed activities will achieve the anticipated results.
- ✓ Gives many unsupported assumptions and reasons with little or no connection to objectives.
- ✓ Tends to “parrot” back the question, rather than answer and explain it.
- ✓ Makes many assumptions and many reasons are not defined.
- ✓ Did not connect the activities to the anticipated results.
- ✓ Does not address or respond to the requirements/conditions of the NOFA.
- ✓ Proposes activities that are not consistent with the NOFA and application instructions.